

AN INTRODUCTION TO GERMAN CONCRETE POETRY

by 533

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PART I
WHAT IS CONCRETE POETRY?

A New Poetry

Concrete poetry is a new and revolutionary poetry. It was developed less than two decades ago concurrently in Europe and South America by Eugen Gomringer, a German Swiss and the Noigandres group of Brazilian poets (Decio Pignatari, Augusto de Campos, Haroldo de Campos). In only 15 years it has grown to be an international movement. The first concrete poems were the result of years of experimentation. Gradually, a poetry developed which had a high visual impact due to a distillation of language. This was a poetry which concerned itself with the word rather than "words, words, words or expressionistic squiggles".¹ The word rather than the line became the basic linguistic unit. The emotion-charged, verbose streams of representational poetry were reduced to clear, light, rational structures in which the content was the very form itself. This reduction of language served to

¹An Anthology of Concrete Poetry, ed. Emmett Williams, (New York, 1967), p. vi.

express a given content more concretely and to achieve "greater flexibility and freedom of communication".²

Marshall McLuhan would not find it at all unusual that this particular age be the one in which a visually oriented poetry should appear. If anything, he might wonder why it was taking so long to be made known to and accepted by larger audiences. Concrete poetry cuts across the boundaries of categories. It has visual, phonetic, and kinetic aspects. Thus it fits quite comfortably into a period wherein artists are involved in action painting, which is performed; in happenings, which know no separation between actors and audience; in short, in multi-media productions of all kinds.

In studying print technology, McLuhan discovered that by its very nature it tended to separate, divide and categorize. Obviously bureaucracies could never exist without their mimeographs, their typewriters and their printing presses. He writes: "The same separation of sight and sound and meaning that is peculiar to the phonetic alphabet also extends to its social and psychological effects. Literate man undergoes much separation of his imaginative, emotional and sense life ..."³ The artists of this

²Concrete Poetry: A World View, ed. Mary Ellen Solt, (Bloomington, 1969), Gomringer, "from line to constellation", p. 69.

³Marshall McLuhan, On Understanding Media, (New York, 1964), p. 90.

generation are cutting across media and breaking down dividing walls in an attempt to reunite our senses and sensibilities and to involve us in as total an experience as possible. Therefore it is in no way surprising that the very medium that gave rise to this state of affairs should eventually be rejected and concrete poets reject representational poetry, the poetry of the long drab line.

The eye that has been trained to travel linearly across the page from left to right, line after line, from top to bottom, is perhaps not as much at home with concrete poetry as the TV viewer whose eyes are accustomed to reaching out and feeling their way across and about a low definition image until they have completed it. Concrete poetry is involving. In the terms of McLuhan it is a cool medium, requiring participation. The perceiver uses his knowledge (memory) and/or imagination to relate, unify or complete a poem. Since the industrial nations of Europe and America are steeped in a visually oriented culture it requires no special literary or artistic talent for the viewer to participate. Mike Weaver notes in an essay on concrete poetry, "To participate in the concrete poem means no more (no less) than paying active attention in perceiving ... The act of perception itself is the first preoccupation of concrete poetry. The optic or visual poet offers the poem as a constellation in space, the kinetic poet offers

it as a visual succession, the phonetic poet offers it as an auditory succession."⁴

Content is secondary for the concrete poet. He is not seeking emotional release, rather he is preoccupied with ways and means of communicating rationally. He reflects the age of science and synthesis. He is concerned with structures and forms. "Content ... is only interesting to the concrete poet if its spiritual and material structure prove to be interesting and can be handled as language."⁵ The manner in which something is said becomes more important than what is said. The poem is arrived at by conscious study of the material and its structure. Thus the poet must acquire some distance from the material. By doing this, emotional contact with the content is dissolved. The poem, no longer an escape valve, is seen during conception and execution as a series of problems. Once the problems are solved, the poem is an object in and for itself.

Consequently, experimental probes are generally conducted along technical, formal lines. "Energy is directed

⁴Mike Weaver, "Concrete Poetry", Lugano Rev., I (1966), pp. 100-101.

⁵Concrete Poetry: A World View, p. 68.

towards solving problems of scale, movement, sequential relations, time, stamina and, above all, the identification of forms. Concrete poetry is an aesthetic movement in poetry, only indirectly concerned with moral, social and psychological values."⁶

Types And Aspects

There are two basic types of concrete poem: the constellation and the ideogram. The first, the constellation, which Gomringer introduced, is the purer type of concrete, resulting as it did from a distillation of language until the poem could consist of very few words and the word rather than the line became the basic structural unit. "It (the constellation) encloses a group of words as if it were drawing stars together to form a cluster."⁷

Figure 1 gives an example of such a constellation. This particular poem dates from 1952. Here words seem to have been randomly picked out of the air and placed in juxtaposition without any particular reason. However, once the reader gets into the poem, he is involved in a force field generated by the interrelationship of these

⁶Weaver, "Concrete Poetry," p. 101.

⁷Concrete Poetry: A World View, p. 68.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE I

Figure 1. Eugen Gomringer
baum kind hund haus

Figure 2. Timm Ulrichs
stets

baum
baum kind

kind
kind hund

hund
hund haus

haus
haus baum

Figure 1

s
s s
t t
s t e t s
t t
s s
s

Figure 2

words: Baum Kind Hund Haus (Tree Child Dog House).
 These are the building blocks. The words are made relative
 to one another by the poet as he composes his constellation:

baum
 baum kind

So the reader is asked to supply the connection. What does
 tree have to do with child, and child with dog, etc.?
 Obviously, each reader will call up different associations
 from his personal memory bank. In the last word group, the
 word "baum" reoccurs. It is the last as well as the first
 word in the poem. This suggests a circle, a magic circle
 encompassing the other "thought-objects" (Gomringer's term)
 in this piece. Or, one can imagine a large tree, dwarfing
 a house with its branches, watching over the unfolding
 drama of a child playing with his dog. Of course the possi-
 bilities are only limited by the imagination of the reader
 and by the fact that they must depart from the four concrete
 "thought-objects" which Gomringer has chosen to put into
 play with each other. Constellations are rendered outside
 the framework of "a representational syntax (a concrete
 syntax being composed of a series of independent or related
 items usually of the same grammatical class). This involves
 a learning process of quite a special order since material
 which is serially structured is not already organized into
 probable forms like material which is naturalistically

structured. The presence of pattern, however, does encourage a systematic approach to the serial poem, and furthers learning by this means".⁸

It should be pointed out that these constellations do not have the same intensity of visual impact as the ideogram, which as we shall see later, often derives its impact on the viewer from optical tricks, gimmicks, effects. This does not mean that the constellation does not have visual qualities. It is interesting to compare this poem of Gomer's with a page selected at random from a book of representational poetry. The difference in the proportion of black print to white space is striking. In most modern books there is no conscious relationship between print and page. However in concrete poetry, even in the constellation, but to a greater extent in the ideograms, forms (words) are arranged in space (page) or against ground, just as a painter concerns himself with negative space, or the composer John Cage concerns himself with silence. So there is a field relationship involved. That is, the concrete poet sees that nothing can exist by itself, that an object or form only exists in relation to and with the space in which it occurs even if this space by 'empty'. Entities exist only in

⁸Weaver, p. 106.

interrelationship, just as black can only exist in contrast to white and vice versa. Form and ground are integral, and in the identification of these forms, "the distinction is made in response to a surface, which is perceived as a whole, instantaneously".⁹

The printed lines of representational verse emphasize an extension in time, phonetic time. The words are read and simultaneously heard by an inner ear. The concrete poem's interrelationship of form and ground emphasize an extension in space; therefore, it is a visual poetry. It is considered poetry since its point of departure is linguistic.

The ideogram is the second type of concrete poem and the one which best exemplifies the growth of form out of content. It is the complement of the constellation, and by far, the greatest number of concrete poems can be placed in its category.

Timm Ulrichs is one of West Germany's second generation of concrete poets. In Figure 2 we have one of the ideograms from his book lesarten und schreibweisen. The word "stets" means: always, ever, constantly, continually. It is an adverb describing duration in space and/or time. The fact that this word is spelled the same way backwards as well

⁹Weaver, p. 101.

as forwards made it possible for Ulrichs to execute this ideogram as he did. Taking "e" as an axis, "t"s and "s"s are radially arranged around it like the petals of a flower, indicating extension in space, or like numbers on the face of a clock suggesting duration in time. As a result of the graphic execution, whereby form and content are fused, the word "stets" becomes concrete.

Thus the ideogram represents an attempt on the part of the poet to make a picture with words so that the meaning inherent in the words becomes obvious to the perceiver. (Perceiver is perhaps a better term than reader when speaking of ideograms.) With the constellation the reader often has to question the poem to determine exactly what the poet meant. This is not the case with the ideogram. Instead one finds verbal and non-verbal communication taking place simultaneously. There are words, but there is also form, visual structure which communicates directly to the eye. Since not all words or groups of words allow good visual interpretation, the communication which takes place by means of the poem is a communication of structure rather than of meaning.

The constellation is somewhat limited but there are innumerable possible variations on the ideogram. In the two examples seen so far, only the visual aspect has been

noted. There are two more important tendencies to concrete poetry, the kinetic and the phonetic. It should be understood however that these tendencies (visual, phonetic and kinetic) are separated for the sake of examination. In reality they are organic to a particular poem and often occur in combination.

In 1960 Gomringer began publishing small books of concrete poetry by other poets. The series was entitled konkrete poesie, and one of the first poets to have his works published therein was a German Claus Bremer. Bremer was involved in theatre as well as poetry and he 'performed' and developed his ideograms on the typewriter. Although the machine is limited somewhat by rigid spacing, Bremer chose to accept this and allow it to speak for him as well as it could. "He uses the typewriter to obtain effects that would be almost unattainable in letterpress".¹⁰

In Figure 3 ("rendering the legible illegible"), we have a kinetic ideogram. Here the illusion of motion is achieved by the arrangement of the words on the page. The right hand margin of the machine is set and the left hand margin contracted with each succeeding line until the original readable statement is made illegible by the piling of

¹⁰Concrete Poetry: An International Anthology, ed. Stephen Bann, (London, 1967), p. 10.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE II

- Figure 3. Claus Bremer
lesbares in unlesbares Übersetzen
- Figure 4. Ernst Jandl
schützengraben

lesbares in unlesbares übersetzen
 lesbares in überlesen
 überlesen
 überlesen

Figure 3

schtzngrrm
 schtzngrrm
 t-t-t-t
 t-t-t-t
 grrrrmmmm
 t-t-t-t
 s-----c-----h
 tzngrrm
 tzngrrm
 tzngrrm
 grrrrmmmm
 schtzn
 schtzn
 t-t-t-t
 t-t-t-t
 schtzngrrm
 schtzngrrm
 tssssssssssssss
 grrt
 grrrrt
 grrrrrrrrt
 scht
 scht
 t-t-t-t-t-t-t-t-t-t
 scht
 tzngrrm
 tzngrrm
 t-t-t-t-t-t-t-t-t-t
 scht
 scht
 scht
 scht
 scht
 grrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr
 t-tt

Figure 4

letters one on top of the other. Thus simulated movement is used to exemplify a meaning inherent in the content. "The action takes place as a result of intrinsic structural tension".¹¹

Thus the kinetic concrete poem has a second aspect which reinforces the visual. The more aspects it is possible to include in a single poem, the more concrete it is apt to become and simultaneously the more effective it will be in enticing the perceiver to participate.

"Schützengraben", Figure 4, is a phonetic poem by Ernst Jandl. Jandl is a sound-poet who continues in the German language the tradition established by Hugo Ball, Kurt Schwitters and especially Raoul Hausmann, three Dadaists who discovered and experimented with phonetic poetry. However there is a major difference between Jandl's work and that of the above precursors. Whereas their phonetic poems were abstract, his are concrete. The abstract poem evinces the desire to create a new language or to transcend language and deal only with sound. The concrete phonetic poem, on the other hand, concerns itself with the word and the transmission of a particular word in a concrete way. Schützengraben is the German word for trench.

¹¹Concrete Poetry: An International Anthology, p. 10.

In this example, Jandl dissects the word, isolating and/or recombining its sounds, repeating them, extending them in time. In doing this he calls up associations with combat, he suggests the noises of battle:

t - t - t - t	machine guns
tsssssssssss	shells overhead
tzngrrmmm	explosions

Jandl's poems are composed to be performed and must be read out loud in order to be fully appreciated. He is concerned with exploring the full range of sounds and inflections inherent in the German language. His poetry is not solely phonetic, since he tries to present each text visually in an original and fitting manner.

Typography

Concrete poetry tends to be executed in standard type faces rather than calligraphy or handwriting. These type faces can be cut out of printed materials and collaged, be set by a printer, be written by typewriter, or pressed on with the new pressure letter sets that come in founts on sheets of plastic. "The desire for a comprehensive view of concrete antecedents has regrettably blurred the fact that ^{that} typographic exactitude, machine precision, is the Western

medium for printed poetry, not calligraphy".¹² Some poets like Pound and Fenellosa have felt that this is a disadvantage. They wonder if the rigid shapes of type can be as expressive as the flow of handwriting and especially the calligraphic, hieroglyphic or ideogrammatic writing of other cultures. "Concrete poets, however, avoid handwriting for machine forms believing that functional precision has its own secrets to reveal".¹³

The problems faced by the concrete poet in interpreting semantic units visually are basically design problems. It is no accident, therefore, that many of the first concrete poets were originally graphic artists, architects and commercial designers. As a designer the poet must know typography or work in conjunction with a printer who has some aesthetic sensibility. He must be able to let his material express itself typographically. Since the visual weight of the word must be directly related to meaning, the manipulation of form, weight and scale of letters and words is essential in presenting a poem visually. The optical and semantic aspects should be perfectly balanced, neither one stronger or weaker than the other.

¹²Weaver, p. 104.

¹³Ibid.

For example, Gomringer's typographic style is very restrained and tends to be uniform throughout his work (cf. Fig. 1.) He prefers lower case to capitals so that meaning is not obscured. The type face is neither too bold nor too light, thus its impact is strong but still of a lyrical quality. To print his poems with another type face would change the poetry and no doubt damage it. Mary Ellen Solt comments: "Much of the meaning in his poems, particularly spiritual content, comes through as the result of the delicate relationship between the scale and weight of his letters and words and the space they occupy".¹⁴

Each poet develops his own style in this regard. Some are bolder, some even flamboyant, but success is measured by what works, and there is as much latitude of expression as there are type faces and poets to manipulate them.

At this point the typographer-poet Hansjörg Mayer["] should be mentioned. Working out of Stuttgart he has been the leading avant-garde typographer in the European concrete poetry movement. He has designed and published the ROI series, booklets of concrete poetry and other experimental

¹⁴Concrete Poetry: A World View, p. 62.

works by the best of the younger avant-garde writers in Europe today. He has also published the FUTURA series of single sheet pamphlets that unfold to large posters as well as many books and portfolios of concrete poetry. He does much of the typographic interpretation for concrete poets who are not well versed in typography. In this work he is especially careful not to let his designs override semantic elements of the poetry.

Germany has a great typographic heritage stretching from the invention of Gutenberg down through the experiments and innovations of exuberant Dada and the more formal and functional Bauhaus movements. Mayer is one of the contemporary culminating points in this tradition and is respected the world over by typographers, printers and artists. He does all of his work with one type face: lower case futura. "All of my compositions are constructed in the concrete way--all material is used functionally. The compositions are based on serial relationships or random systems of the 26 letters of the alphabet".¹⁵ Figure 5 is an example of his work.

¹⁵Concrete Poetry: A World View, p. 18.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE III

Figure 5. Hansjörg Mayer
untitled

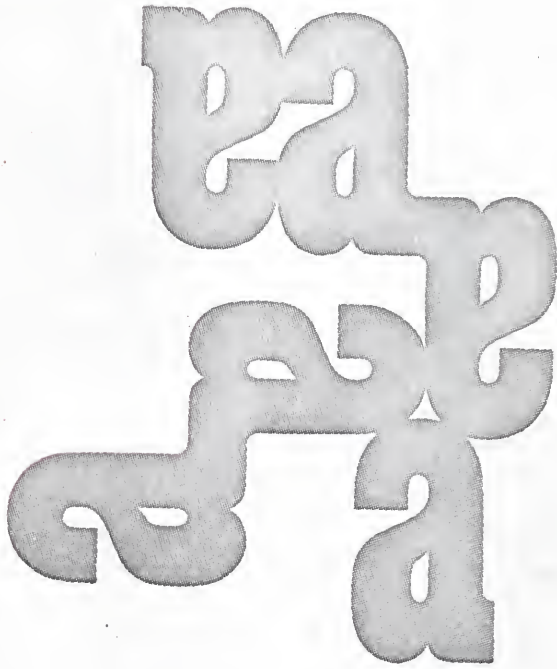


Figure 5

A Working Definition

It is somewhat difficult to define exactly what concrete poetry is. Any attempt that was too narrow would probably exclude major works. Definitions by their very nature are limiting, yet concrete poetry tends to expand, to be inclusive, to cut across boundaries and break down categories. However the following statements can be safely made. These statements are only intended to prevent confusion with other already existing types of poetry (representational, abstract) without excluding the possibility of new formal developments in the field of visual poetry itself.

Concrete poetry is a non-representational, non-abstract medium of poetic expression, of which the basic structural unit is the word rather than the line. Because it deals with reduced language it allows the development of visual syntax or meter. Concrete poetry is non-specialized and shares an interrelationship of visual, kinetic and phonetic tendencies.

PART II
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

Any new medium of expression is usually brought under attack or is completely ignored by academy and critics until a sufficient body of works justifies its existence. Over the last several years, more and more books of concrete poetry have appeared. Longer established, less avant-garde literary magazines are becoming interested in works of a concrete nature and beyond this several international exhibitions of concrete poetry have taken place in Europe and South America, including a large one in 1968 sponsored by the city of Hof, West Germany. The German and Brazilian influences have spread throughout Western and Eastern Europe and South America and have reached as far as Japan. Even the United States is gradually awakening to the movement.

New media are also more readily accepted if it can be demonstrated how they developed from already accepted media. Since nothing is conceived in a vacuum, concrete poetry also has its roots. The first concrete poets published manifestoes to inform the literary world, and anyone else who was interested, about their new discoveries in visual

poetry. At the same time they attempted to make the transition from representational to concrete poetry more smooth and acceptable by explaining what steps were taken in the discovery and development of this new medium.

Picture Writing

Jean-Francois Bory, in his new book Once Again discusses the link that writers and artists have with the past and the fascination of the concrete poet with writing itself. "In taking its roots and in developing itself from elements that until then had not been considered to be part of literature (posters, signs, milestones), Concrete Poetry has only gone back to the origins of literature, picking up a thin thread which, ..., has always been maintained, from the code of Hammurabi through the manuscripts of the master calligraphers of the middle ages and on down ..." ¹⁶ Here he is speaking principally in reference to the ideogram. The manipulation of words pictographically is in a tradition which stretches back to the dawn of writing.

The first known form of writing was the pictograph. It was the most primitive type of written communication.

The pictograph is a simplified but direct representation of an object. The picture of an eye represents an eye. This manner of writing must necessarily remain somewhat limited in scope since man feels the need of going beyond the simple description of objects to express more abstract concepts. Writing is a process of abstraction; the more it develops, the less concrete, the more abstract it becomes.

The next stage of abstraction resulted in the ideogram. Here there is still a synthesis of form and meaning, but basic pictographs are combined or modified in order to represent ideas as well as objects. Figure 6 gives an example of pictures and ideogrammatic (hieroglyphic) writing combined on a page from the Egyptian Book of the Dead. Chinese writing ceased to develop at this stage, whereas Japanese continued to evolve a phonetic script equivalent to our alphabet.

The syllabary and the alphabet are further steps in this process of abstraction. The syllabary is more bulky than the alphabet. Generally each consonant sound is combined with each possible vowel sound and every one of the resultant combinations is given an individual sign. The alphabet is a yet more advanced system wherein the

EXPLANATION OF PLATE IV

Figure 6. Examples of pictures combined with ideogrammatic writing (Egyptian hieroglyphs)



Hieroglyphic text arranged in several columns. The text is partially obscured by dark, irregular shapes at the bottom, which appear to be redactions or damage to the original image. The characters are small and densely packed in vertical columns.

Figure 6

written symbols are reduced (by splitting vowels and consonants) to the minimum number necessary to transliterate the language's sound system. This is phonetic writing.

Cuneiform writing from ancient Sumer offers a good example of the transition from pictographs through ideograms to phonetic writing. A table illustrating this is found in Figure 7.

Representational poetry often attempts to communicate some very abstract ideas which are easily misunderstood. The concrete poet wants to make sure he is understood. He attempts to communicate simply and graphically. He needs many more symbols (forms) to do this but the resultant ideograms are more concrete and less open to misinterpretation.

Down through the centuries, calligraphers, printers and poets have experimented with embellishing writing, with drawing words or making pictures with words. They did this to render meaning more obvious or for eye appeal. The picture poem represents the attempt to fuse verbal and visual messages. There are many examples in various languages through the centuries, but most of them are rather obscure and ill known. Perhaps a good example would be Lewis Carroll's "Mouse's Tale" from Adventures in Wonderland.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE V

Figure 7. Development of cuneiform symbols from pictographs to Classic Assyrian.













































































































Original pictograph	Pictograph in position of later cuneiform	Early cuneiform	Classic Assyrian.	Meaning
				heaven
				god
				earth
				man
				pudenda
				woman
				mountain
				mountain woman.
				slave-girl
				head
				mouth to speak
				food
				to eat
				water in
				to drink
				to go
				to stand
				bird
				fish
				ox
				cow
				barley
				grain
				sun
				day
				to plow
				to till

Figure 7

This is, of course, a visual and literary pun simultaneously, a play on the words "tale/tail". The pun is expressed graphically by having the text form a tail. (See Figure 8) The way this "tale" breaks up the even lines of print is pleasantly stimulating to the eye. For this same reason, photographs are used to spice up the textbooks.

Dada

The Dada movement was significant in several ways in the development of concrete poetry. Besides a few specific connections, the most important influence Dada had was the spirit of scepticism and experimentation that it fostered. Without the dissatisfaction with representational poetry and the willingness to search out new forms, concrete poetry would not have evolved.

Dada was an iconoclastic movement which began in a cabaret (Cafe Voltaire) in Zurich in 1916. The poets and artists of the movement broke from tradition and through their art, which they called "anti-art", ridiculed and castigated a diseased society. Due to their explorations, many new media were discovered or have since been developed. Among these are: collage, montage, action painting, phonetic poetry, concrete art, found object art, automatic writing,

EXPLANATION OF PLATE VI

- Figure 8. Lewis Carroll
The Mouse's Tale
- Figure 9. Apollinaire
untitled calligramme

5
 Fury said to
 a mouse, That
 he met
 in the
 house,
 'Let us
 both go
 to law:
 I will
 prosecute
 you.—
 Come, I'll
 take no
 denial;
 We must
 have a
 trial:
 For
 really
 this
 morning
 I've
 nothing
 to do.'
 Said the
 mouse to
 the cur,
 'Such a
 trial,
 dear sir,
 With no
 jury or
 judge,
 would be
 wasting
 our breath.'
 'I'll be
 judge,
 I'll be
 jury.'
 Said
 the
 cur,
 'I'll try
 the white
 mouse,
 and
 send you
 to
 death.'"

"You are not attending!" said the Mouse to Alice, severely. "What are you thinking of?"

"I beg your pardon," said Alice very

Figure 8

A
B
C
D
E
F
G
H
I
J
K
L
M
N
O
P
Q
R
S
T
U
V
W
X
Y
Z

Douces figures pol
 MIA
 YETTE
 ANNIE
 o u
 vous
 jeunes
 MAIS
 pres d'un
 jet d'eau qui
 pleure et qui prie
 cette colombe s'extasie

Chères lèvres fleuries
 MAREYE
 LORIE
 MARIE
 êtes.

Tous les souvenirs de Billy Dalitz
 O mes amis partis en guerre? Où sont les noms de mélancoliques
 Jaillissent vers le firmament? Où les pas dans une ogive
 Et vos regards en feu doré? Comme des pas dans une ogive
 'Moude mélancolique? Ou est Creminis qui s'engage
 Où sont ils Braque et Max Jacob? Où sont les souvenirs mon âme s'élève
 Derain aux yeux gris comme la pluie? Où sont les souvenirs mon âme s'élève
 C'est où sont partis à la guerre au nord se battent maintenant
 Le soir tombe O sanglante nuit
 Jardins ou saigne abondamment le loup rose leur guerre

Figure 9

the environment, the happening and others. The Dadaists fostered a process rather than a product oriented art. Hans Richter, one of the original Dadaists wrote: "Dada was not an artistic movement in the accepted sense; it was a storm that broke over the world of art as the war did over the nations. It came without warning, out of a heavy, brooding sky, and left behind it a new day in which the stored up energies released by Dada were evidenced in new forms, new materials, new ideas, new directions, new people-- and in which they addressed themselves to new people".¹⁷

Guillaume Apollinaire, a leader among avant-garde French writers during the first world war was peripherally involved in Dada. He published his second volume of poetry, entitled Calligrammes in 1918. As a poet he was primarily concerned with the sound of words, but he also thought that their visual arrangement on the page could aid in conveying meaning or make a more exciting delivery. Most of his calligrams were scribbled on odd scraps of paper such as telegraph forms. Figure 9 is an example of a dove and a fountain. His picture poems were an inspiration to typographers, although they presented some difficulties

¹⁷Dada: Art and Anti-art, (West Germany, 1965), p. 9.

because they were handwritten. They were appreciated immediately by the Dadaists who knew him.

One evening in June of 1919, Hugo Ball introduced abstract phonetic poetry into the Dada movement. This took place at the Cafe Voltaire. The event was so novel that the audience wasn't even aware that something new and different had taken place. All they heard was a series of strange sounds. Later a whole evening was devoted to this new medium. Ball, Raoul Hausmann and Kurt Schwitters were the principal Dadaists interested in abstract phonetic poetry.

Abstract poetry is, in a sense, the desire to create a new language. Hausmann wrote: "When language becomes petrified in the academies, its true spirit takes refuge among children and mad poets".¹⁸ Abstract poetry is not concerned with meaning. It remains poetry according to its rhythm and flow, but it is abstract and divorced from message. It is simultaneously phonetic, intoxicated with sound. These poems were composed to be read aloud, to be performed. Figure 10, "Karawane", is one of the first abstract phonetic poems. In 1917, Ball wrote the following

¹⁸Richter, p. 119.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE VII

Figure 10. Hugo Ball
Karawane

KARAWANE

jolifanto bambla ô falli bambla

grossiga m'pfa habla horem

égiga goramen

higo bloiko russula huju

hollaka hollala

anlogo bung

blago bung

blago bung

bossó fataka

ü üü ü

schampa wulla wussa ólobo

hej tatta gôrem

eschige zunbada

wulubu ssubudu uluw ssubudu

tumba ba- umf

kusagauma

ba - umf

(1917)
Hugo Ball

53

Figure 10

note in his diary on the subject of phonetic poetry:

"In these phonetic poems we want to abandon a language ravaged and laid bare by journalism. We must return to the basic Alchemy of the Word, and leave even that behind us, in order to keep safe for poetry its holiest sanctuary".¹⁹

It was from these early abstract, phonetic poems that the Austrian poet Jandl got the original impetus to experiment with sound poems and eventually to develop his own concrete phonetic poetry.

Dada was instrumental in revolutionizing typography. Dissatisfied with the endless miles of ugly grey pages that rolled en masse off the printing presses, they began mixing and juxtaposing all sorts of type faces. Surprise and chance were the major elements in their compositions. Some extremely striking and refreshing posters, magazines and books ensued. (See Figures 10, 11) From these original carnivals of print more serious work was to evolve.

Directly related to the phonetic poetry mentioned above was some of Hausmann's typographical experimentation. In the phonetic poem, duration in time was as important as the sound produced and Hausmann experimented with breathing and with the duration of pauses as well as words or sounds.

¹⁹Richter, p. 42.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE VIII

Figure 11. Sample of Dada typography.

THéâtre MICHEL 40 rue Des Mathurins

SOIRÉE du COEUR le Vendredi et samedi 7 JUILLET 1923

la grande semaine a été prolongée jusqu'au 7 juillet

ORGANISÉE PAR ! TCHÉREZ A BARBE Location: Bernheim-Jeanne, 25, Bd de la Madeleine; Derand, 4, Place de la Madeleine; Povolosky, 13, Rue Bonaparte; Au Sans Parol, 27, Avenue Kléber; Sin, 8, Avenue Lovendal; Paul Guillaume, 59, Rue La Boétie; Librairie Mornay, 37, Bd Montparnasse; Paul Rosenberg, 21, Rue La Boétie et au Théâtre Michel. Tel. : Gut 63-20.

P	Une place de loge	20 fr.
r	Fauteuil d'orchestre.....	25 fr.
	Fauteuil de balcon	
	1 ^{er} rang.....	15 fr.
\	Fauteuil de balcon.....	15 fr.

Figure 11

He was, furthermore, concerned with developing a way of putting the phonetic poem down on paper, as a script to guide performance. He tried to express the sounds typographically. He wrote: "I had used letters of varying sizes and thicknesses which thus took on the character of musical notation. Thus the optophonetic poem was born. The optophonetic and the phonetic poem are the first step towards totally non-representational poetry, abstract poetry".²⁰ Figures 12 and 13, K'perioum, demonstrate one of his optophonetic poems; first in handwriting, then set in type.

This attempt to express content through form (although at a naive stage) was to develop and mature in the works of the modern concrete poets who lean heavily on typography in their medium. In Dada's experiments with typography, shape and meaning began to merge. "Text and its typographical expression became inseparable; substance and image belonged together ... The reader had to learn to treat nothing discernible in the text as unimportant; this meant scanning the text henceforward, just as carefully as a picture".²¹

²⁰Richter, p. 121.

²¹Astronauts of Inner Space, ed. Jeff Berner, (San Francisco, 1966), p. 16.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE IX

Figure 12. Raoul Hausmann
K'perioum (handwritten)

Figure 13. K'perioum
(typeset)

K'perioum l'perioum
 nm'periii tperroum
 bpretiberre brrebee
 omndooooohglainpuk
 omnpout perikool
 rreeeee EEE rreeeee A
 apderree mglepadonou
 nthou tnoumt
 fmsbwtözäu
 pggiv-mü?
)FFEAHBDc
 BDQ! qiyee!

Figure 12

k'erioum l'p'ER ioum
 Nm'poriii
 bpretiberre brrebee
 ONNOo gplanpouk
 kongpout
 R.EEe EEE rreeeee A
 apderree EEE
 mglepadonou
 MInou tnoumt

Figure 13

Concrete Poetry

Concrete poetry developed simultaneously in Europe and South America during the fifties. The two languages in which most of the early concrete poems were written were German and Portuguese. In Europe, during the early years, the movement was strongest in the German speaking part of Switzerland, in Austria and in West Germany. In 1955, in Ulm (Germany) a meeting took place at the Hochschule für Gestaltung between Eugen Gomringer and Decio Pignatari. Gomringer was Swiss and Pignatari, Brazilian. They were both interested in concrete art and the attempt to apply its principles to the written word. They had both composed poetry in a concrete vein. After comparing notes, they recognized the relatedness of their work and the fact that constructivist poetry was gaining an international interest. They agreed to call their work concrete and with this meeting the international movement of concrete poetry was officially recognized. The first concrete poets turned away from emotion-laden, cliché-ridden, representational poetry and attempted to transcend the problem of creating new poetry from tired language by concentrating on form. They felt that "the old grammatical-syntactical

structures are no longer adequate to advanced processes of thought and communication in time".²² In Brazil, in 1958, Pignatari and other Brazilian concrete poets published a pilot plan for concrete poetry in which they stated: "assuming that the historical cycle of verse (as formal rhythmical unit) is closed, concrete poetry begins by being aware of graphic space as a structural agent".²³

With these manifest statements representational poetry was left behind and the principally visual quality of concrete poetry was recognized.

Eugen Gomringer is credited with being the father of concrete poetry. His poems are concrete in the purest sense. Although poets in other countries were experimenting with concrete techniques in the early fifties, Gomringer was unaware of them as he published his first constellation in 1953 and his first manifesto from line to constellation in 1954. The first poet to have a major influence on Gomringer in his search for a new style of poetic expression was the East Prussian poet Arno Holz (1863-1929). Holz had broken away from traditional meters and structures. His work, no doubt, impressed Gomringer because of the freedoms

²² Concrete Poetry: A World View, pp. 7-8.

²³ Weaver, p. 122.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE X

- Figure 14. Arno Holz
Draussen die Düne
- Figure 15. Eugen Gomringer
du blau
- Figure 16. Eugen Gomringer
wind

Draußen die Düne.

Einsam das Haus,
eintönig,
ans Fenster
der Regen.

Hinter mir,
tictac,
eine Uhr,
meine Stirn
gegen die Scheibe.

Nichts.

Alles vorbei.

Grau der Himmel,
grau die See
und grau
das Herz.

Figure 14

du blau
du rot
du gelb
du schwarz
du weiss
du

Figure 15

w w
d i
n n n
i d i d
w w

Figure 16

he had taken with language. Figure 14 is the selection "Draussen die Düne" from Holz's book Phantasmus.

This poem draws a picture. Ignoring traditional concepts of line, rhyme and meter, not a superfluous word is used. Simple, exact verbal strokes sketch the mood of a rainy day, of isolation, the passage of time, of melancholy within and without. Small details are rendered crystal clear. Instead of reading a description of the clock, one hears it: tictac / eine Uhr. The words tend to be precise and concrete.

This poem is obviously a major step in the direction of concrete poetry although according to concrete standards it would still be considered verbose and Holz hasn't yet achieved enough distance from his subject to remain free of emotion as is obvious from words like "einsam", "eintönig" and "grau" / "das Herz". Apparent also is the fact that Holz is still representing the outside world in the poem rather than letting it be its own subject.

The poem also has visual qualities. Traditionally verse is lined up in relation to the left hand margin of the page. In "Draussen die Düne" the lines are arranged about a central axis, thus setting off long and short lines as well as verses and resulting in a series of pleasantly different, abstract shapes.

Gomringer had also become aware of concrete art. He was acquainted no doubt with the works of Hans Arp, Moholy-Nagy, Piet Mondrian and the concrete artists associated with the Bauhaus movement. Furthermore, he became personally acquainted with a group of concrete painters in Zurich during the war years.

Hans Arp, an Alsatian, was a concrete artist concerned with natural forms more than geometrical harmony as Mondrian was. He did not represent or abstract from nature however, but allowed natural forms to become concrete in his mind. He once wrote: "nous ne voulons pas copier la nature. nous ne voulons pas reproduire. nous voulons produire. nous voulons produire comme une plante qui produit un fruit et ne pas reproduire. nous voulons produire directement et non par truchement. comme il n'y a pas la moindre trace d'abstraction dans cet art nous le nommons: art concret".²⁴

Gomringer visited several exhibitions of concrete art in post war Zurich, wrote a review about one of them, and met Max Bill, a German concrete artist and critic, whose secretary he later became at Ulm. Bill, who interpreted Kandinsky and many of the concrete artists, had a major influence on Gomringer.

²⁴On My Way, (New York, 1948), p. 98.

Between 1950 and 1952 the poet had two rather unproductive years. These were transitional years, during which he passed from representational poetry to his constellations. This came about after a "lengthy study into the presentation of script on the page".²⁵ His first constellation was written in 1952 and a year later he published Konstellationen, his first book.

In Figure 15, the poem "du blau" (thou blue) from the year 1953 demonstrates well enough the formal difference between Holz's poem in which we recognized concrete tendencies and the purely concrete constellation. A large amount of reduction has taken place. The structural effect of repetition is utilized as well as serial order rather than normal syntactic order. Here a cluster of colors are attracted to the pronoun "du". This is a warm concrete poem, much warmer than most. One sees the moods of the person addressed, symbolized by colors, happy moods, sad moods, but finally, when all the moods have passed, it is the warm, personal "du" that remains.

Gomringer reduced language still further until he was able to create poems from a single word. Then, of course, the letters become the structural units to make up the

entity of the word-poem. With this reduction it was necessary to experiment with graphic space. Since printing a single word on a page in an orthodox manner would hardly be considered a poem, the configuration of a single word poem must be quite expressive. Just such a poem is "wind" in Figure 16. Printing this word so that it can be read in several directions (the structural technique of inversion) and leaving plenty of white space, it is given an ethereal quality which captures somewhat the nature of wind.

His work is readily seen as related to concrete art in its precision and clarity. The techniques he uses are constructivistic, structures ensue from content and there are no rules of construction imposed from outside. "Everything comes from the material: a design (or system) organic to the word as a material object, its inherent message, and the space it occupies, which can be utilized as semantic content".²⁶

In 1954, Gomringer published the manifesto from line to constellation, in which he gave the raison d'etre for concrete poetry. In it he mentions the compression of language which is taking place in our modern graphic culture. He points out that simplification and compression have always been an

²⁶Concrete Poetry: A World View, p. 10.

essential element of poetry. "The aim of the new poetry is to give poetry an organic function in society again, and in doing so to restate the position of the poet in society".²⁷ No longer should the poet be writing for other poets but for people in general and he feels that this can come about since the understanding and appreciation of concrete poetry requires no extensive literary training. In regards to the constellation he states:

"The constellation is the simplest possible kind of configuration in poetry which has for its basic unit the word, it encloses a group of words as if it were drawing stars together to form a cluster.

The constellation is an arrangement, and at the same time a play-area of fixed dimensions.

The constellation is ordered by the poet. He determines the play area, the field of force and suggests its possibilities. The reader, the new reader, grasps the idea of play, and joins in".²⁸

Although much of the European concrete poetry written in the fifties was written independently of Gomringer's influence, he did have a great impact on the German speaking poets.

27

28

The Austrian poet, Gerhard Rühm, indicated the relationship of his poems to Gomringer's when he entitled one of his books konstellationen. Rühm along with Ernst Jandl, Oswald Wiener, Friedrich Achleitner and others was a member of the Wiener Gruppe (Vienna Group); a group formed by poets with experimental and innovative attitudes in order to share ideas and techniques.

Claus Bremer, one of the first concrete poets of West Germany, was also influenced by Gomringer. Gomringer saw Bremer's typographic ideograms as being related to and an extension of the constellation. He recognizes Bremer in one of his critical articles. "To date I see only in the experiments of Claus Bremer, in his poems in the form of ideograms, genuine enrichment of the constellation".²⁹

CONCLUSION

Concrete poetry is well into its second decade. Two generations of concrete poets already exist. The originators are now publishing their collected poems and the best examples of their work are found in every anthology of concrete. For all practical purposes their influence has abated. New and younger poets have entered the field and with them has come new energy.

Germany, Austria and Switzerland are no longer focal points of activity of the European concrete movement. Although the initial breakthrough in concrete techniques was made by Germans, the international quality of concrete quickly became apparent. At this time, the foremost creators of visual poetry are natives of France, England and Japan. Among these are: Jean Francois Bory, Julien Blaine, Pierre Garnier, and Henry Chopin of France; Ian Hamilton Finlay, John Furnival and Thomas A. Clark of England; Kitasono Katue and Seiichi Niikuni of Japan.

These new artists did not remain satisfied with pioneer techniques but sought more and more latitude of expression. Their attitudes have remained essentially exploratory and experimental. For this reason, it becomes increasingly more difficult to define concrete poetry. Any definition

is either exclusive and therefore unjust or it is too inclusive and worthless definitively. Thus it is at present almost impossible to define. All that can be done is to describe. Because of the many difficulties involved in categorizing much of the newer concrete poetry most of the poets invent their own terms to describe their work. Generally the term 'visual poetry' is becoming more widely used since it is less limiting than 'concrete'.

Almost all of the early concrete poems were limited to a single page. In this regard, they were very much like posters and many of them have been printed in such a format. The poster poem as a medium is still and will probably continue to be the most widely developed medium of visual poetry. The main reasons for this are its simplicity and the economy of time and material involved in its execution.

Another medium which is receiving more and more attention from visual poets is the "book". Until recent years, there have been no book designers. Publishing houses employed artists and draftsman for cover design, but each element of book composition was treated as a separate problem. The new field of book design is in its infancy and the designers are working out ways of unifying the book.

To do this, for example, appropriate type faces are selected, visual themes are designed to unify cover, title page and other pages outside the body of the text. However for the experimental poet or artist this is not enough. The medium of the book offers a chance to utilize concrete techniques for something besides poster poems. The experimental artists believe that one should not write a piece of prose, or a series of poems and have someone else put them into a book form; rather, one should literally write a book. Commercially, designers are now beginning to cooperate with authors. Experimentally, the author and the designer are the same person.

A third major avenue of expansion which seems to be developing rapidly in Japan and France is object poetry. This includes machine poems, sculptural poems, games and other objects which result from a linguistic stimulus utilizing concrete techniques. John Furnival of England has created a babacus which consists of a box containing about 28 rods which can be made to rotate by handles on the outside. On these rods are skewered hundreds of blocks, the four visible sides of which are inscribed with select words. By manipulating the babacus any number of poems can be produced. Ian Hamilton Finlay, also of England, has been combining talent with sculptor Henry Cline to

produce outdoor sculptures, in metal and concrete, which are extensions of concrete poems. The creative possibilities in this realm are as vast as the languages, materials and imaginations of the poet-artists.

Although the concrete poetry movement has expanded internationally, spreading from its countries of origin to most westernized nations, it is still too soon to determine whether or not it will endure. It may pass as a creative fad in a few years or it may develop and grow more sophisticated in materials and techniques and eventually establish itself as a hybrid medium somewhere between poetry and the graphic arts. It is hoped that in the not too distant future appropriate critical perspectives may be gained so that definitive research can be accomplished in the field of concrete poetry.

APPENDIX

Eugen Gomringer

Figure 17. schweigen
silence

'schweigen' is another example of the poet's work which utilizes graphic space in a striking way. The field is built up with repetitions of the word 'schweigen' and then its meaning is driven home by leaving a blank space in the center which speaks even louder than the word itself. Although this poem is published with his constellations, by definition it appears to be an ideogram.

Figure 18. fliegt
flies

strömt entgegen	/	breitet sich aus	/	umhüllt
streams against	/	spreads itself out	/	surrounds
verdünnt sich	/	löst sich auf		
thins itself out	/	dissolves itself		

This poem seems to be rather mystical in nature. To replace 'flies' with 'flows' would make the poem sound like a translation from some book of Taoist philosophy. In effect it is speaking of some type of energy which changes form constantly and remains constant only in so far as it always moves and changes.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE XI

Figure 17. Eugen Gomringer
schweigen

Figure 18. Eugen Gomringer
fliegt

schweigen schweigen schweigen
schweigen schweigen schweigen
schweigen schweigen
schweigen schweigen schweigen
schweigen schweigen schweigen

Figure 17

fliegt
strömt entgegen
fliegt
breitet sich aus
fliegt
umhüllt
fliegt
verdünnt sich
fliegt
löst sich auf
fliegt

Figure 18

Figure 19. alles ruht
all is still

alles ruht / einzelnes bewegt sich
all is still / something stirs

This poem is somewhat of a concrete rondeau. There are only two basic lines which are juggled throughout. A poem about motion and stasis. The last line is the same as the first. The end circles back to the beginning.

Figure 20. sonne
mann
sun
man

sonne / mond / mann / frau / kind
sun / moon / man / woman / child

In this constellation man is linked mystically with sun and woman with moon as in some primitive fertility rite. A coupling takes place on two levels. First sun and woman, moon and man are united symbolizing union of the spiritual and physical, earth and heaven. In the third word group, man and woman are united physically and the sun and moon return to their own realm. The result is obvious.

Claus Bremer

The following selections are from Bremer's latest book: Texte und Kommentare. Here the ideogram is extended to what the poet chooses to call a 'text'. He sees the

EXPLANATION OF PLATE XII

Figure 19. Eugen Gomringer
alles
ruht

Figure 20. Eugen Gomringer
sonne
mann

alles ruht
einzelnes bewegt sich

bewegt sich einzelnes
alles ruht

ruht alles
einzelnes bewegt sich

bewegt sich einzelnes
ruht alles

alles ruht
einzelnes bewegt sich

Figure 19

sonne mann
mond frau

sonne frau
mond mann

sonne mond
mann frau

kind

Figure 20

"Ein Text ist eine offene Welt. Er ist Material. Wenn der Leser damit umgeht, versetzt er sich in sich selbst".³⁰

The comments on Bremer's texts are his own. They have been selected and translated by the author.

Figure 21. um weiter zu kommen ausweichen
 in order to advance to step aside/ to give way

"The words 'um weiter zu kommen' push the word 'ausweichen' ahead of them, or in other words, the word 'ausweichen' gives way to the words 'um weiter zu kommen'. The giving way of the word 'ausweichen' allows the words 'um weiter zu kommen' to advance. But advancing is eternal. Is eternal advancing progress?".³¹

Figure 22. für dich und für mich
 for you and for me

"The alphabetical material I used in 'für mich und für dich' I arrange alphabetically in the second five lines. With these so arranged letters I wrote 'für dich und für mich'. You can do that too. Or you can try something else with them. In my opinion, these letters only have meaning when one writes 'für dich und für mich' with them".³²

³⁰ Claus Bremer, Texte und Kommentare (Steinbach, 1968), unnumbered.

³¹ Bremer

³² Bremer

EXPLANATION OF PLATE XIII

Figure 21. Claus Bremer
um weiter zu kommen, ausweichen

EXPLANATION OF PLATE XIV

Figure 22. Claus Bremer
für dich und für mich

für
dich
und
für
mich

Figure 22

ccd
dffh
hii
mnr
ruüü

Figure 23. nicht nur informieren haltungen provozieren
 don't just inform provoke attitudes

"The text 'nicht nur informieren, haltungen provozieren' reveals its play with words and its reasons only to the one who reads the theme from right, top and left, that is, to the one who confronts it from all sides.

All texts which I show here, are so written that a field of action for the attitudes which they invite can also be found in social and political situations. These are not engaged texts, these are engaging texts".³³

Figure 24. immer schön in der reihe bleiben
 always stay in line

"I was hardly able to stay in line and at the same time to write 'stay in line' down the whole column, line after line. But my effort removes for you the effort of reading it. Since, just as one can hardly manage to write the text in this form, one can barely manage to read it line for line. The 'keeping in line' of 'immer schön in der reihe bleiben' causes one not to keep in line, rather on the contrary, to remove oneself from the ranks. This organization, as all of my texts, liberates the reader in the realm of his own possibilities, which makes us brothers".³⁴

³³Bremer

³⁴Bremer

EXPLANATION OF PLATE XV

Figure 23. Claus Bremer
nicht nur informieren,
haltungen provozieren

EXPLANATION OF PLATE XVI

Figure 24. Claus Bremer
immer schön in der reihe bleiben

Gerhard Rühm

Rühm is Viennese and a member of the Wiener Gruppe. He is a musician as well as a poet. He has had exhibitions of visual poetry and cooperated with the Wiener Gruppe on an anthology of dialect poetry.

Figure 25. ich gehe nicht allein
i don't go alone

A self-explanatory ideogram. Simply by removing the negative 'nicht', the 'allein' is separated and the idea of isolation is accentuated.

Figure 26. die blume blüht welkt
the flower blooms withers

In this poem the repetition of the words 'die blume' builds a stem formally. The remainder is a contrast, a tension set up between light and dark, life and death as the flower withers or blooms. The vowels are interesting visually, since the 'e' appears closed and drawn up in itself, whereas the 'u' is open at the top like a cup.

Figure 27. und zerbrechen
and fragment/ splinter/ break up

Another ideogram. Here after a series of 'und's the meaning of 'zerbrechen' is concretely demonstrated by breaking up the word irregularly, that is, not syllabically, according to normal usage.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE XVII

- Figure 25. Gerhard Rühm
ich gehe nicht allein
- Figure 26. Gerhard Rühm
die blume
- Figure 27. Gerhard Rühm
und zerbrechen

Timm Ulrichs

Figure 28. stücke
pieces/ fragments

Here a vertical framework is set up by building the left and right hand margins with the beginning and end of the word 'stücke'. The meaning of the word is rendered visual by its being broken up within the field encompassed by the poem. The fragments as they are scattered across the field also form micro-constellations.

Figure 29. ununterbrochen
uninterrupted

In this poem a group is formed by repeating the word 'ununterbrochen' in columns leaving a space which renders concrete the meaning of interrupted. From the bottom a row of 'un's are rising and already the first one has filled the gap, negating the interruption, thus 'ununterbrochen': uninterrupted. Here movement is suggested. One has the feeling that one has only to push a little from the bottom and the rank of 'un's will rise upwards and fill in the remaining gaps.

Figure 30. ebbe und flut
ebb and flow

The arrangement establishes a tension between the two words 'ebbe' and 'flut', a tidal relationship. The words alternately flow and retreat across the page.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE XVIII

Figure 28. Timm Ulrichs
stücke

Figure 29. Timm Ulrichs
ununterbrochen

stück			ü		c	•
s	t		tück			ke
s			ü			e
st		ü		c		cke
st		c		k		ke
stü			ü		ck	e
s	t					e
stü		ü		ck		cke
st			üc			e
st			c			ke
stü			tü			cke
s			t			ücke
s						ke
stüc			ück			tücke
s			tüc			ücke
st				ück		e
st		t		k		ke
s		tüc		ck		e
s				k		e
stüc			k			e
s	tü		c		k	e
st	ü		c			e
s		tü		c		ke
s		t		ü		cke
s		t		üc		ke
stü		tü	ck			e
s		üc		ck		e
st			üc	k		e
s	t	ü	c		k	e
s						e

Figure 28

un terbrochen
 un terbrochen
 un terbrochen
 un terbrochen
 un terbrochen
 ununterbrochen
 un
 un
 un
 un
 un

Figure 29

EXPLANATION OF PLATE XIX

Figure 30. Timm Ulrichs
ebbe und flut

ebbeebbeebbeebbe
 ebbeebbeebbeebbe flut
 ebbeebbeebbe flutflut
 ebbeebbe flutflutflut
 ebbe flutflutflutflut
 flutflutflutflutflut
 ebbe flutflutflutflut
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 ebbeebbeebbeebbe flut
 ebbeebbeebbe flutflut
 ebbeebbe flutflutflut
 ebbe flutflutflutflut
 flutflutflutflutflut

Figure 30

Ernst Jandl

Figure 31. schmerz durch reibung
pain through friction

The sound 'fr' is onomatopoeic and represents two objects rubbing together. It also happens to be the first two letters of the verb 'frottieren', to rub. 'au' is an exclamation of pain. Together they spell woman, wife, a person whom one shouldn't rub the wrong way.

Figure 32. die zeit vergeht lustig
time passes merry

By making merry, in having fun, time passes. But constant pleasure becomes monotonous as Jandl demonstrates by increasing the repetitions of 'lus' with each line. Simultaneously the repetition of 'tig' sounds close to 'tic' which suggests the ticking of a clock, the passage of time.

Figure 33. niagara felle
niagara falls

Short and simple, the lengthening of the 'a' sound seems to suggest the scream of someone falling over niagara falls. The effect is similar to one used in comic books.

Figure 34. ein ganzes lavoir beschutz mich gott vor so
 viel wasser
a whole washbowl god save me from all that water

The shape rather than the sound seems to be the principal factor evoking humor in this poem.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE XX

Figure 31. Ernst Jandl
schmerz durch reibung

Figure 32. Ernst Jandl
die zeit vergeht

frau
 frfrauau
 frfrfrauauäu
 frfrfrfrauauauau
 frfrfrfrfrauauauauau
 frfrfrfrfrfrauauauauauau
 frfrfrfrfrfrfrauauauauauauau

Figure 31

lustig
 luslustigtig
 lusluslustigtigtig
 luslusluslustigtigtigtig
 lusluslusluslustigtigtigtigtig
 luslusluslusluslustigtigtigtigtigtig
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 luslusluslusluslusluslustigtigtigtigtigtigtigtig

Figure 32

EXPLANATION OF PLATE XXI

- Figure 33. Ernst Jandl
niagara felle
- Figure 34. Ernst Jandl
ein ganzes lavoir

Hansjörg Mayer

Figures 35 - 38 are taken from Alphabetenguadrante, number 26 in the Rot series. Mayer is not concerned with meaning in this particular work but in the changes that take place as patterns of letters are built up and the density of super-imposed letters increases. The letters are positioned according to a strict mathematical formula. This formula controls the rhythm of the buildup of letters, so that the quadrants are in effect orchestrated. What is ultimately impressive is the final page where what were once familiar characters have taken on a foreign aspect. One gets a similar feeling to scanning an alien script such as Chinese or Minoan. Although the symbols are strange they seem to be charged with meaning for the person who can decipher them.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE XXII

Figure 35. Hansjörg Mayer
Excerpt 1 of 4 from Alphabetenguadrade

a b c d e f g h

Figure 35

EXPLANATION OF PLATE XXIII

Figure 36. Hansjörg Mayer
Excerpt 2 of 4 from Alphabetenguadrat

k m l
g h i
f i
e d
c z
a b
y
x w
v
t
s
r q
p
o n

Figure 36

EXPLANATION OF PLATE XXIV

Figure 37. Hansjörg Mayer
Excerpt 3 of 4 from Alphabetenguadrate

e w a j x g b o t k m r z q c l s h p y f u i n d v
 o f s z c i j v x a k m r y q u b e m h q g d p l n
 f k r t y g i j l a z m t s i v o u d e x c b j n h w p
 d k c f t a l g x i p h z w b e j q y o r e u s n m r v
 t c a f j b o d v s y g w l u e i q z i o q w a n x p m
 l y r e m v f n a b p j d s t z h i o l h d a n q f m
 k v y w i g e p x s r t b c u o z h u c b l r m t w o
 j q z e s g i y v a p n d k f r v u s t e i p j x y b
 z o c f n k m a w h q g d l r q r m j s d h i u b p w t
 y g e c o x k v f z a n p z l q n h w v y e o j i s g t z
 r b f l q d u c h y j i v q n b g m l o h w u k t h r d
 q m k b n w o c i r x f p m x o e v s q n h u l k t h r d
 p e a y i b g j i c z f o p j m b a f s g h w t k n v e y
 w u d z r x c l i q o p j l v d z a p e g q o e n m y w i
 i b r m f o c s f a j x b r t l k z t j n b f p l t e v h w
 p h d u v c s f a j x b r t l k z t j n b f p l t e v h w
 n u l y g k m z e h i k l c s a d y n b f p l t e v h w
 f y z q n g a r j o m g q s d l t p c f d p a e y x m i t e r g s z
 z i k x c u r j b o s k a b s n i g o y o i y p h g a r x
 q w u v h o w x k d r q a b s n i g o y o i y p h g a r x
 n e v h o w x k d r q a b s n i g o y o i y p h g a r x
 a y m l o h w b i s l d e n f v q k y r m k t o j y p h g a r x
 t d w v j i w i g z l d e n f v q k y r m k t o j y p h g a r x
 q a o j w i g z l d e n f v q k y r m k t o j y p h g a r x
 d m k u s e b w n l c f v q k y r m k t o j y p h g a r x

Figure 37

EXPLANATION OF PLATE XXV

Figure 38. Hanjörg Mayer
Excerpt 4 of 4 from Alphabetenguadrade

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AN INTRODUCTION TO GERMAN CONCRETE POETRY

by

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ABSTRACT

Concrete poetry first came to the attention of the public in the early fifties. A hybrid poetic medium, somewhere between lyric poetry and the graphic arts, it developed simultaneously but from different points of departure in Brazil and the German speaking countries of Europe: Austria, Germany and Switzerland. The concern here is with German concrete poetry.

The first part of this paper examines the types of concrete poem (constellation and ideogram), as well as aspects (optic, phonetic and kinetic) which occur singly or in combination. It also examines constructivist attitudes and techniques of concrete in contrast with the more expressionistic qualities of representational poetry. The concrete poet sees the word as the basic unit rather than the line. Words are materials with which he constructs a poem. The finished poem is an object in and for itself and not the representation of an object. The form of the finished poem grows organically from the content and is structured according to internal laws recognized by the poet.

In the second part a historical background is provided to show that concrete poetry is not completely new, but is an extension of a vein of pictographic writing which has been with man since the dawn of writing. The formal development of concrete from representational poetry is also traced by using the constellations of Eugen Gomringer as examples.